

Navy Medicine and President Kennedy's Autopsy:

Recollections from a former White House Physician

On 22 November 1963, the body of President John F. Kennedy was transported from Dallas, TX, to Andrews Air Force Base and taken to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC), Bethesda, MD where a postmortem examination¹ was performed by a team of Navy and Army pathologists.² Two White House physicians—RADM George Burkley, MC, USN and LCDR James Morningstar Young, MC, USN^{3,4}—stood watch over the procedure.

In 2001, now retired CAPT James Young, shared some of his recollections of Kennedy's death and autopsy with the BUMED Office of Medical History.⁵ The following passages are excerpted from those oral history sessions.

Transporting President Kennedy's body to Washington, DC.

The prosecutorial attorney or whoever it was that was in control in Dallas was not going to release the body to anybody because it was a case of homicide and it was in his jurisdiction to control that particular body until such a time as the homicide could be concluded or the investigation concluded and go on from there. And it took Bobby Kennedy to call the Attorney General of Texas⁶ to get the attorney from the Dallas area to release the body so that they could put it back on Air Force One and bring it back to D.C. And that's what actually was done. He actually interceded with the Attorney General of Texas and got the body on Air Force One.

Well, on the way back Doctor Burkley had talked with Mrs. Kennedy. And he was on the plane with them and had told me that we should prepare Bethesda to receive the body and that they would be doing the autopsy in Bethesda and I should

¹ The autopsy was performed in the Navy Medical School morgue then located in what was termed the "ground floor," now the basement leading to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Building 1 (Tower).

² CDR (later CAPT) James Joseph Humes, MC, USN (1925-1997), CDR J. Thornton Boswell, MC, USN (1922-2010) and LtCOL (later COL) Pierre Antoine Finck, MC, USA (1923-).

³ VADM George Burkley, MC, USN (1902-1991) became Kennedy's physician on 18 June 1963. He would later serve as President Lyndon Johnson's primary physician until January 1969. CAPT James Young (1929-2008) served in the Navy from 1955 to 1975.

⁴ Medical illustrator HM2 Harold Rydberg and Medical Photographer Dennis Stringer were also on hand to document the procedure. Rydberg's illustrations were later used in the *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy* (AKA, "Warren Commission Report," 1964).

⁵ This oral history was conducted in multiple sessions over the telephone by Jan K. Herman and André B. Sobocinski, BUMED Office of the Historian on 4, 10, and 17 December 2001.

⁶ Waggoner Carr (1918-2004) served as the Attorney General of Texas in 1963.

notify the pathologist to go ahead and get individuals who were appropriate to do the job, and that I had done. At that time there was Commander Jim Humes was the Chief of Pathology at Bethesda and there was another gentleman by the name of Boswell, Commander Boswell who was another individual who was the Assistant Chief of Pathology at Bethesda at the time. So Jim Humes decided that he wanted a forensic pathologist also there. So he called over to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and got another pathologist from there who had done a lot of forensic work on individuals who had died in the service...[He] had had a lot more knowledge about doing autopsies on individuals who had complicated issues. His name was Finck, F-I-N-C-K.

But anyway what happened was the body coming back from Texas landed at the Air Force Base there in D.C., Andrews I think it was...[as] they were offloading the casket to put it into a Navy ambulance it slipped and actually one of the handles broke off the coffin. So there's been a lot of furor about Kennedy leaving Texas in no body bag. And, lo and behold, when he got to Bethesda they had a different coffin and they had him in a body bag. Well that's what happened. They had to change coffins before they took him out to Bethesda. So they changed the coffin to get one that did not have a broken handle on it, and apparently put him in a body bag. That explains that particular situation or at least it explained it to me at that time.

Mrs. Kennedy went to Bethesda with a number of others. She was out there with Dave Powers⁷, with Kenny O'Donnell⁸, the Secret Service, and a Doctor Walsh⁹, I think was his name, was her obstetrician and gynecologist. And she had obviously a great rapport with him and had had the loss of her child, you know, that summer. Doctor Berman¹⁰ had been a great deal of help with her. So he was called in by her I think and went to the 17th floor at Bethesda which is the flag area at Bethesda and that was where they actually occupied themselves until the autopsy was finished.

Dr. Young's Reflections on the Autopsy

The autopsy began around five or five-thirty in the afternoon and actually went until four-thirty the following morning. And I was still in the White House at around five o'clock or thereabouts and there were a couple of corpsmen still there. I thought I was going to go out to Bethesda because George Burkley had gone along with the body and whatnot out to Bethesda. And I said I'm going to try and get Doctor Burkley to go ahead home and get some rest because he's obviously, as I said before, he was probably 30 years older than I at the time and I was a little bit

⁷ Dave Powers (1912-1998) was a special assistant to President Kennedy.

⁸ Kenneth O'Donnell (1924-1977) was a top aide to President Kennedy.

⁹ Dr. John Walsh (1913-2000) was Jackie Kennedy's obstetrician and delivered her two children.

¹⁰ Dr. Edgar Berman (1915-1987) served as a medical consultant to various federal agencies

concerned for his welfare. So I said I'm going to go out to Bethesda and I'm going to try to relieve him out there. And I'll stand by at Bethesda and I said you folks here go ahead and lock up and you can go home after that if you choose or whatever you wish to do. Well, they all came out to Bethesda, all the corpsmen who were assigned to the White House at the time.

I stayed at the autopsy all night long with both Doctor Burkley and watched Jim Humes, Boswell and Finck do their job with X-rays and pictures and whatnot. And it's terribly unfortunate that Doctor Berkeley actually gave an order to Jim Humes sometime later at the request of Robert Kennedy, I believe, that all of the autopsy notes that he had taken and done during the autopsy should be destroyed. Which apparently he did. Jim Humes, which is a tragedy because I think that it's too bad. Only to go ahead and keep the lid on the fact that President Kennedy really did have Addison's disease¹¹, and on autopsy he had no evidence of any adrenal glands at all. None. They couldn't find any piece at all.

They had atrophied?

They had atrophied totally away. There were no adrenal glands found at autopsy. Now that's because of perhaps two reasons. One, because he may have had the Waterhouse- Friderichsen Syndrome¹² when he had his back plate removed. But on the other, it could be also that by substituting steroids on a daily basis and continuing him on steroids his adrenal glands would have atrophied also in that case. So either way, he was certainly Addisonian. So that brings us to the following day, and the following day I was in the White House . . .

Let me backtrack just for a moment. So you were actually present then during at least part of the autopsy?

Practically the whole autopsy. The whole thing. I have something here that I was going into the next day that'll explain even more to you. This will explain considerably more, let's put it that way. What it amounts to is the following day I

¹¹ Addison's disease is a disorder that occurs when your body produces insufficient amounts of certain hormones produced by your adrenal glands. In Addison's disease, your adrenal glands produce too little cortisol and often insufficient levels of aldosterone as well. Also called adrenal insufficiency, Addison's disease occurs in all age groups and affects both sexes. Addison's disease can be life-threatening. Treatment for Addison's disease involves taking hormones to replace the insufficient amounts being made by your adrenal glands, in order to mimic the beneficial effects produced by your naturally made hormones (www.mayoclinic.com).

¹² Waterhouse-Friderichsen syndrome is failure of the adrenal gland due to bleeding into the gland. This condition is usually caused by severe infection with meningococcus bacteria or other severe infection from bacteria. (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus).

was in the White House all day waiting on Mrs. Kennedy and I talked with her a couple of times that day and I took care of her that night. And I stayed in the White House actually three straight days. I slept in the Doctor's Office in the White House. But on the 23rd of November, sitting in the afternoon, I couldn't stand to watch the television anymore because there was furrowing over who shot whom and what was going on with Oswald and all that sort of stuff.

So I sat down and I said, I don't know what's going to happen to me or my family because now President Johnson is going to be here. And he has two doctors that I know of, Doctor Jim Cain¹³ out in Mayo Clinic and Doctor J. Willis Hurst,¹⁴ who was the Chairman of the Department of Medicine at Emory Medical School. And I said those were very close to him and Willis Hearst had taken care of President Johnson while he was at Bethesda during his heart attack and so they were still very close. So I didn't know what was going to happen.

So I sat down on Saturday afternoon, and I wrote this whole epistle, and I'm going to read it to you. This is called "What Price a Rose?"

[*Reading from his essay, "What Price a Rose?"*]

"President John Fitzgerald Kennedy began a trip to Texas in a jubilant mood because for the first time in many months his wife was accompanying him. He was in robust health having no difficulty with his chronic back problem. He was well-controlled on his other medications, even so much as to say finitely controlled. Doctor Burkley was relaxed and looked forward, somewhat skeptically, to the Texas trip. His immediate problems with Doctor Travell¹⁵ were at least superficially controlled."

Now remember, this was the day after his assassination. I'd written all of this. I still have it, of course. "After a few speeches in Dallas on the morning of the 22nd of November, 1963, President Kennedy took the lead car in a motorcade to the Trade Fair. Unfortunately, as usual, with the President's consent, Doctor Burkley and [Master] Chief Hendrix¹⁶ were following in a 'VIP Bus' about six cars behind the lead car. Chief Hendrix was the first in the bus to note something wrong. He saw people suddenly start falling to the ground far up ahead.

¹³ Dr. James Cain (1914-1992) was an internist at the Mayo Clinic for 30 years and a personal physician to President Johnson. Dr. Cain gained national prominence in October 1965 when he was attending physician for President Johnson's gall bladder surgery.

¹⁴ Dr. J. Willis Hurst (1920-2000) served as President Johnson's cardiologist.

¹⁵ Dr. Janet Travell Powell (1901-1997) was a pain specialist and personal physician to President Kennedy. Dr. Travell became widely known in 1961, when she became the first woman to be personal physician to a President. The appointment caused a minor stir, especially in the military, which had been providing medical care to Presidents, their spouses and their children since the 1920's

¹⁶ Master Chief Hendrix (??-??) was one of two hospital corpsmen with the White House Medical Unit serving as physiotherapists. Hendrix was also a registered nurse (source: Travell, Janet. *Office Hours: Day and Night-The Autobiography of Janet Travell*, 1968).

Then the motorcade began to speed forward. At this time, Chief Hendrix spoke to the local District Attorney and said 'I think something's wrong.' (He was oh so very right.) The 'VIP Bus' continued to the Trade Fair, when attempt was made to find someone with information regarding the whereabouts of the President when it was noted that he was not at the Trade Fair. Doctor Burkley, Chief Hendrix, Mrs. Gallagher,¹⁷ who by the way was Mrs. Kennedy's Social Secretary, "and Mrs. Lincoln made their way to an exit with the Secret Service men. They stated that contact was lost between the President's car and their radio.

Then word was obtained that the President was at Parkland Memorial Hospital. Within five minutes Doctor Burkley and his group were at the hospital. When Doctor Burkley arrived, the President was already in the emergency room. He had a cut-down in place and a tracheotomy was being performed. Meanwhile, external cardiac massage was being applied. Solu-cortef¹⁸ was given IV and an external cardiac pacemaker was obtained. Doctor Burkley immediately evaluated the situation as hopeless as soon as he saw the gaping, bloody macerated huge wound and defect in the right posterior occipital area. He went outside to talk to Mrs. Kennedy and brought her inside for a few moments for her to view the scene. She stayed for a few moments, then went outside. The two priests arrived and the Last Sacrament was given to a presumably dead man.

Doctor Burkley then broached the news to Mrs. Kennedy who briefly broke down and cried. She then went inside and getting down on her knees was led in ten minutes of prayer by the two priests. It is necessary in this brief chronicle to give expression to some of the difficulties inherent in this situation. Doctor Burkley had come to the White House as Assistant White House Physician. Primarily, by virtue of the fact that he had been Commanding Officer of the Washington Naval Dispensary on Constitution Avenue and because he had traveled around the world with former President Eisenhower. Doctor Janet Travell had been appointed by President Kennedy as Physician to the President because of her loyal political support and because of her previous contribution by procaine¹⁹ injections and ethyl chloride²⁰ sprays to get him off his crutches and walking after serious surgery to his back for a fusion met with subsequent infection. He was a U.S. Senator at that time. She also had a picture in her office quoting almost directly 'To Doctor Janet Travell without whom all of this would not have been possible.'

After Doctor Burkley and Mrs. Kennedy had prayed, Doctor Burkley picked up two of Mrs. Kennedy's bouquet of roses which had been stuffed into a trash can. The two beautiful American roses falling to the floor. These were the roses that

¹⁷ Mary B. Gallagher (1926-) was the personal secretary to President Kennedy. She accompanied Dr. Burkley, Chief Hendrix and Mrs. Kennedy on the flight transporting Kennedy's body to Washington, DC.

¹⁸ Solu-cortef (hydrocortisone sodium succinate) is an anti-inflammatory drug.

¹⁹ Kennedy received daily injections of Procaine hydrochloride (Gerovital H3) for his back pain.

²⁰ Ethyl chloride is used to prevent pain caused by injections and minor surgical procedures (www.webmd.com).

Doctor Burkley picked up and put into his pocket. Mrs. Kennedy refused to leave the side of her husband and from that moment until this she has been either in the same vehicle or the same building with her husband.

In the ambulance carrying the body to the waiting Air Force One plane Doctor Burkley, who was sitting on the ambulance floor beside the unanchored casket carrying his beloved President, gave the two roses to Mrs. Kennedy. He said that since the roses had been in the room during the entire time of the emergency treatment he thought that she might like to have them. Thus, she took the roses in her blood-caked gloves and put them into her blood-spattered jacket pocket. Mrs. Kennedy had been urged to change her clothes because her stockings were all blood-spattered and her gloves soaked with blood, but she said, 'So, I want everyone to see and remember this horrible thing.'

After the distressing flight of Air Force One to Washington during which the whole world stood shocked, stunned, bewildered and sorrowed, the casket was taken from the plane and a small piece was broken from the bronze casket. A small side note was revealed when the City Coroner of Dallas refused to allow the President's body to be removed from Dallas because this was 'a case of homicide.' It was necessary to secure a ruling by the State Attorney General who said 'waive all the restrictions now.'

The President was taken to Bethesda Naval Hospital by Navy ambulance and an autopsy was to be performed. Mrs. Kennedy, Mr. O'Donnell, Mr. Powers, Mr. O'Leary,²¹ Doctor Walsh and Doctor Burkley went to the Presidential Suite on Tower 17 at the Naval Hospital. Doctor Walsh had met Air Force One at the airport after a call had been placed by Doctor Burkley from the plane. My day had been very usual with no real problems except to arrange a quadrennial physical for Secretary Orville Freeman²² to be held in the White House. He was a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps and had just finished talking to Mr. John McNally,²³ a Presidential Special Advisor, about his recently diagnosed gallstones. It was about one forty and Chief Martinell²⁴ had just had a telephone call from Chief Mills²⁵ who said he just heard something on the radio about the President being shot. At the instant that Martinell was hanging the phone onto the receiver Mr. McNally burst into the Dispensary and said, 'The President's been hit. Come with me, Doc.'

²¹ John J. "Mugsy" O'Leary (??-??) was a Kennedy family bodyguard and limousine driver.

²² Orville Freeman (1918-2003) was a former governor of Minnesota (1955-1961) who served as the Secretary of Agriculture in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations (1961-1969).

²³ John "Jack" McNally (1930-) was one of President Kennedy's youngest aides.

²⁴ HMC William Martinell (??-??)

²⁵ HMC Thomas Mills (??-??) was a hospital corpsman assigned to help inspect the Kennedy limousine following the assassination.

We then went to the Secret Service Office with Mister Jerry Behn²⁶ in the East Wing on the run, incongruous as it may seem, running through the beautiful marble and carpeted floors of the White House. It was a matter of Mister Behn keeping a line open to Dallas and giving us snatches of information. He said 'the President's been hit, in the head I think.' At about one fifty, he said 'they say the President's critical and that Governor Connally²⁷ has been hit too.'

At this point I turned and said 'I'm afraid that's it' and walked suddenly feeling horrified and dejected toward the door making a thumbs-down gesture. At about one fifty-five Mister Behn said quietly, 'The President's dead.' Major Stover of the White House Police who only two nights before had attended with his wife their first White House reception in his 23 years of service said "oh no." With that the room emptied and the whole mechanism of activity was transferred to Mister McNally's office.

I, feeling completely hollow, shocked and dejected, trudged slowly back to the Dispensary²⁸ hardly noticing all of the historic evidences so aptly and appropriately, as well as tastefully, displayed by Mrs. Kennedy along the way. I obviously wondered what had happened and what this would do to the Nation with Lyndon B. Johnson as their leader, as well as what it would do the world and the much smaller world of the Youngs who so briefly had tasted the fleet pungent fruit of success and now the bitter harsh pill of disaster. This meant most likely that because Doctor Travell had been ministering all degree of succor to Vice President Johnson and since Doctor Burkley had not had one iota of treatment opportunity of the Vice President, the job of Presidential Physician would pass back to the lady physician.

With this idea gnawing at me, I went to the Dispensary, sat and stared at the horrible sad accounts coming from the television. I then began to have some information come to me about the President going to Naval Hospital Bethesda for an autopsy. This I just discovered by a phone call from Bethesda after which I immediately sought out the Naval Aide and inquired about the possibility. He said that he had the word and told Mister Cutcomb²⁹ to make the arrangements. Thereafter, I was in contact with the hospital notifying Captain Canada³⁰ of the projected arrival time, the probability of transport by helicopter of the body, and

²⁶ Gerald "Jerry" Behn (??-??) was the Special Agent-in-Charge (SAIC) of the White House in 1963.

²⁷ John Connally (1917-1993), Governor of Texas, was sitting directly in front of President Kennedy in the when the shots rang out and was seriously wounded.

²⁸ White House Medical Unit.

²⁹ Unknown???

³⁰ CAPT (later RADM) Robert Canada, MC, USN (1913-1972) commanded the Naval Hospital at NNMCMC Bethesda, MD, from 1962-1965. From 1968 to 1969, he commanded NNMCMC.

informing him that I had procured a security guard from the Military District of Washington to stand by at the heliport in Bethesda by his request.

Changes then indicated that the body would be brought to Bethesda by Navy ambulance. Captain Canada then requested the press official to help control the Press, which I attempted to obtain by a request to Mister Hatcher³¹ to no avail. After the third request to the now President Johnson's Press Secretary, I was successful. After completing my work here and talking to Doctor Burkley by phone, it was decided that we all should go home since nothing further could be accomplished here. With that, Chief Hendrix and I left with Chiefs Martinell and Mills remaining to lock up.

I thought that on the way home I would stop and offer my assistance to Doctor Burkley at Bethesda and see if I could get him to get some rest. This was obviously to no avail. Upon meeting him there we were joined by Chief Hendrix who had just happened to go to the hospital as well. We shortly were joined by Chiefs Mills and Martinell who had brought an envelope to Bethesda which contained material removed from the convertible which they had been requested to obtain."

This I'm going to put in parenthetically. This is not written. Doctor Burkley and I had requested them, at the request of Doctor Humes, to go down to the White House after three or four hours in the autopsy room. And Doctor Humes had said that he was missing some bones from the President's skull. And he wondered whether there might be some pieces left in the back of the "Queen Mary"³² and that he would like to get those pieces and bring them back to Bethesda so he could reconstruct the head.

That was the car in which President Kennedy was riding in Texas. And they did. They went down, both Chiefs Mills and Martinell went down to the White House and then this I'm going to continue. "The envelope contained three pieces of skull bone, one about three inches in diameter, another two inches in diameter and the third about one to one and a half inches in diameter. It also contained a brass slug about half a centimeter in diameter and distorted. These were found on the floor of the blood-spattered convertible. The convertible was splattered with considerable brain tissue. This also, I noted, on the back of the jacket of Agent Greer,³³ the President's driver.

[Continues to read from essay, "What Price a Rose?]

³¹ Andrew Hatcher (1923-1990) associate press secretary to President Kennedy.

³² Queen Mary II and Queen Elizabeth II were nicknames for President Eisenhower's limousines later used by Kennedy.

³³ William Greer (1909-1985) was a Secret Service Agent who was driving the "Queen Mary" at the time of the assassination.

“Another small incident occurring on the plane was when Mrs. Kennedy was convinced to take off her blood-soaked dried glove which after removal remained in the shape similar to a grasping hand or almost to the hand of a Pope’s Benediction. All of the White House medical were then taken to see the remains of the man whom they had so valiantly and yet hopelessly maintained in excellent health by their physical therapy as prescribed by Doctor Hans Kraus.³⁴ He had been brought into the treatment picture shortly after Doctor Burkley was designated as the President's physician.

When we saw the body it was amazing to see that the undertaker had already done a magnificent job. He was lying smiling beautifully with a shock of unusually colored auburn red rusty brown hair glowing. His look was of utter contentment. His worries had been passed from his shoulders to others and he had gone on to a far greater reward I'm sure. In heated discussions about his maintenance of Secret Service security measures he was overheard saying that he didn't want certain things because, as he said, ‘I will not live in fear.’ He had also commented just a week prior on his New York visit when he had no motorcade in New York that ‘no one wants to shoot me.’ When seeing him, I walked to the head of the table and looked at the gaping defect in the right posterior and middle cerebral areas, which had no obvious skull covering lying anywhere in sight.

It was determined that he had been struck by two bullets, the second most probably striking him in the right occiput with the bullet lodging in behind the right orbit or at least a fragment of the bullet lodging there. With the first shot he sat upright. The shot entered about the level of the third dorsal vertebrae exiting through the trachea. It was almost certain that he died within a very short time because of the extensive brain destruction.

It was determined later that the shot in his back exited through the trachea because the surgeon made a tracheostomy immediately at the site of the bullet's exit. But from the first cry from Mrs. Kennedy when she said 'oh no' and her husband slumped forward mortally wounded and dying with her hands covering his mutilated wonderful head, fate had taken its toll. And history again had repeated itself -- taking a president from office by death about every 20 years.

The scene, the setting, the background has now been laid. With all the trial and tribulation that has come to Doctor Burkley he had one glowing irreplaceable, touching and even heart-rending triumph. With Mrs. Kennedy's obvious antagonism toward him, he had asked her onboard Air Force One about the hospital to which the body was to be sent, stating that he had no preference whatsoever where the body should go. And that he wished only for her to choose to enable him to make the arrangements. Whether it was the touching tribute of the roses or whether it was from a deeper sense of respect, admiration and faith long held by

³⁴ Dr. Hans Kraus (1905-1995) was a physician and physical therapist who treated President Kennedy. He is considered one of the fathers of the field of Sports Medicine.

Mrs. Kennedy but not expressed, she stated that the body was to be taken to the Bethesda Naval Hospital.

There in Tower 17 the price of the roses was again paid. Mrs. Kennedy called Doctor Burkley to her about an hour after his arrival in Tower 17 and in a side bedroom in a very touching tender moment, she presented one of the two roses to Doctor Burkley for his undivided, devoted, undying service to his most-respected President. With this the chronicle is complete and now only history and the future can tell what price the roses."

And that I signed James M. Young, M.D., Physician to the White House, 23 November of 1963, White House Dispensary. It's all in longhand.

That's very eloquent, Doctor Young.

Well, it was something that I felt at the time, you know, and those things bring out that kind of eloquence. Okay, well I'll continue on because I gave this copy, of course this is all written in longhand, it's about 21 pages long on, you know, one of those tablet paper things, the lines and so forth.

And I've got the blue lines on it and all, just as it was. I took it over to Kinko's and had them duplicate it and I have given a copy of this to each of my eight children, so now it's kind of history. And on top of that I've got the original, it's in the safety deposit box that we have. But the most significant part of this is that after reading it, after having given it to our children, I reread it again before I gave it to them. And I came across this issue of the bullet that we had asked the two corpsmen to go down to the White House and pick up what was in the back of the car.

They picked up the bullet off of the floor in the back of the car. Well, I decided that this is something, you know, the third bullet has never been decided about ever, apparently. So what I did was I decided there was only person still alive from the original Warren Commission. I went through the entire Warren Commission book. I've got the whole report of the Warren Commission as a matter of fact. I went through the whole thing and there was nothing in it.

Now, at that particular time nobody said anything about this. And I know what we did. We brought that in, I mean Chief Martinell and Chief Mills went to the White House, went to the Queen Mary, got the stuff off of the floor in the back seat, brought it back out to us and we gave that to Commander Humes at the time.

I don't know what happened to it, so I decided that what I would do is I would write to President Ford, which I did. I wrote to President Ford and asked him, this was this past summer. I asked him about, you know, did he know anything about this particular bullet that was given to the autopsy surgeons and he wrote me back a very nice letter, said, "No, he didn't know anything about it, had not heard anything about it ever." Well, at that point then I began to look around for other issues and I found that Senator Arlen Specter had been an Assistant Counsel to the Warren Commission.

So I made a telephone call to Senator Specter's office, got one of his individuals, told that individual about what I had and what I was concerned about, and I wanted to talk with Senator Specter. Well, he did call me back and we spent, oh God, half an hour on a Friday night about ten thirty at night, he called me back and we talked about it. And he said well send me the material, he said, and I'll see what we can do. So I have sent him a copy of "What Price a Rose?" and asked him to look into what happened to that bullet. Now just to reassure myself, Chief Martinell unfortunately has died. Chief Mills had become a Lieutenant Commander in a Medical Service Corps and retired from the Navy.

However, I found him living in Johnson City, Texas, where he had been working for the Johnson family on the ranch and whatnot. But he had retired in Johnson City. I picked up the phone and I called him. He confirmed exactly what I had put down in my notes, that there was a bent brass slug that they had brought out that they had picked up off the floor of the Queen Mary.

Well, thank you for sharing that with us.

Well, it's an interesting commentary and there's no question, well there's no question in my mind but the President was shot from behind. Something that other people don't really know and I never put it in this particular article is that people don't understand why President Kennedy, after the first shot, was not completely forward and fell on the floor of the car. But he had actually sat upright and both hands came up towards his neck apparently where the shot had come in from the back and exited his trachea. He put both hands up at that time. People didn't know that we had him in a back brace from underneath his axilla to his hips, and he couldn't move forward or to the side.

But when he was shot in the right occiput, his entire left side, his entire motor cortex was destroyed. So he had no ability to control anything on his left side, and thus he slumped over and fell with his head down into his wife's lap, with this horrible gaping bleeding wound showing up at her. And that's why she jumped up out of the car and tried to crawl over the back of the trunk. And that's when Clint Hill saved her by pushing her back into the back seat of the car. Well, that's exactly what happened, but his head fell down right in her lap with this terrible gaping bleeding mass of brain and whatnot that was there. And, of course, the thing that I've said in here about Bill Greer, who was driving the Queen Mary was that [he] had brain tissue and blood spattered over his right posterior shoulder. Which, in my estimation could only have made that bullet come from behind, not from the grassy knoll, not from the side, not from the air or whatever. It had to come from behind and spray forward onto his right shoulder.

Additional Kennedy Assassination Resources:

Kennedy Autopsy Report.

Link: <http://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report>

November 22, 1963: Death of the President

Link: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/November-22-1963-Death-of-the-President.aspx>

Oral History Interview with Admiral George G. Burkley, October 17, 1967

By William McHugh

Link: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-GGB-01.aspx>